

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
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Wednesday, November 19, 2008

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MICHIGAN REPORT

The Capitol Record Since 1906

REPORT NO. 224, VOLUME 47-- TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18 2008

D.H.S. REPORT: DEMAND FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE, OTHER SERVICES UP, SPENDING DOWN

As demand for programs such as food assistance and extended benefits increased in September, overall spending on assistance decreased, according to the most recent [statistics](#) from the Department of Human Services.

Since August, DHS has changed its reporting system, going from a short Fact Sheet that included the number of enrollees in major programs to a lengthy, detailed document, making it possible to now report the amount spent on each program along with changes in enrollment.

While the number of Michigan residents on all forms of assistance held steady in September at about 1.3 million, total spending for all programs fell to \$168.3 million in that month compared to \$171.6 million in August. That works out to .6 percent more recipients and 1.2 percent less spending.

That means that while most programs are increasing in numbers, the amount spent on assistance was generally down from August to September.

For example, in the food assistance program, which has steadily gained in recipients for the last 12 months, there were 614,995 households in September, compared to 609,614 households in August but spending decreased from \$129.7 million in August to \$128.8 million in September.

The Family Independence Program, meanwhile, saw total cases and spending fall in September. That month there were 9,935 families on state FIP benefits at a cost of \$4.5 million, down from 10,101 families at a cost of \$5.4 million in August.

Extended cases, which provide limited cash benefits to maintain access to other services, had been increasing over the summer but fell slightly from July to August and then rose again from August to September. There were 4,708 cases in September, up from 4,662 in August. There were 4,762 in July and 4,691 cases in June.

Spending for the EFIP program rose slightly to \$47 million in September from \$46.6 million in August.

Childcare assistance numbers inched upward as well in September with 48,000 cases, up from 47,837 cases in August. The numbers have remained consistent all year with only slight changes each month, especially in the summer, when children are out of school and temporarily spike the program's participant count.

Childcare reimbursement spending decreased slightly, landing at \$29 million in September from nearly \$30 million in August.

[Statistics](#) source: http://michigan.gov/documents/dhs/DHS-AsstPay0908_255558_7.pdf

Dore demands trial on domestic violence charge; jury selection set to start today

Posted by [alpayne](#) November 19, 2008 09:05AM

Bay City businessman Art Dore says a lovers' quarrel has been blown out of proportion, and now it will be up to a jury to decide. Trial was to begin today on a domestic violence charge against the 72-year-old Toughman impresario and local club owner.

Dore is charged with striking his 51-year-old girlfriend in the face as he drove home to Bay City after a gathering at an area resort. If convicted of the misdemeanor, Dore faces a maximum possible sentence of up to 93 days in jail, although his lack of criminal history would likely result in a lighter sentence.

Dore's attorney, Matthew Reyes, said Dore's conduct was not criminal.

"Mr. Dore pled self-defense from the very beginning," Reyes said. "He said 'She attacked me and I responded.' ... His response of hitting her once was a reasonable response to her conduct."

Reyes and Assistant Bay County Prosecutor Scott Gordon argued a mixed bag of pre-trial motions before Bay County District Judge Timothy J. Kelly on Monday. One thing Reyes wants allowed entered is recording of a 911 call from a third party reporting a previous conflict between Dore and his girlfriend. Reyes says the call indicates the alleged victim's history of aggression.

"Art Dore has been confronted with direct physical attacks from (the alleged victim) before," Reyes said.

The alleged victim in the case has asserted her Fifth Amendment rights not to testify against Dore, and Gordon plans to call the director of the Bay County Women's Center to testify about the "Power and control wheel" involved in domestic abuse situations.

Domestic violence "is a unique malady in our society and not everyone understands the facts of the case," Gordon said.

Reyes said such testimony would be ridiculously inappropriate to the point of "perpetuating a fraud on the jury."

"It implies to the jury that somehow Mr. Dore has done something to prevent her from testifying," Reyes said. "That's not the case. She has been advised by her counsel not to testify because to do so would be admitting to a felony or committing perjury."

But Gordon said a domestic violence expert can shed light on the alleged incident. He also said that if Dore decides to take the stand "he's going to have to testify to some things I believe are evidence of that power-control wheel."

Both attorneys want to limit which evidence the other can present at trial.

Reyes wants to prevent Gordon from allowing statements the alleged victim made to Bay County Central Dispatch operators after she called 911 just before 7 p.m. on June 26. Gordon wants Judge Kelly to deem the statements an "excited utterance," which is an exception to the court rule that excludes hearsay evidence.

"The victim stated she was assaulted by her boyfriend ... that he hit her in the face with his hand with a ring on it and that her face was bleeding and her jaw was sore," Gordon said.

Reyes said he "will admit she sounds upset" but there may be "other motives for her calling the time that she did."

Allowing evidence of the alleged victim's statements without providing an opportunity for cross-examination of the victim would deprive Dore of his Sixth Amendment right to confront his accuser, Reyes argued.

Gordon wants to prevent Reyes from introducing another 911 call, one made by a third party over "some alleged incident" at the Big House Sports Bar, a Midland Street establishment owned by Dore.

According to the Bay County Sheriff's incident report, the alleged victim said Dore became jealous after a man touched her arm at the meeting, then struck her in the face as he drove the Hummer down US-10.

"All of a sudden he hit me," the alleged victim told a deputy, according to his report. "Art hit me in the face; it felt like a brick. I think he hit me with his Toughman ring."

She said she believes she lost consciousness and Dore shoved her to wake her up when they reached their Bay City home. She called 911 after he drove away. But when the deputy interviewed her in the Bay Regional Medical Center emergency room, she said she didn't want to press charges. She had an abrasion with bruising on her right cheek and a bruise on her right clavicle, the report indicates.

A deputy also interviewed Dore after a Michigan State Police trooper stopped his vehicle on Euclid Avenue near Indiana Street.

Dore told the deputy that his girlfriend is "a jealous lady" and became upset about him talking to a woman at the event. He said his girlfriend started hitting him "so I swung at her to get her to stop."

Dore was arrested and lodged briefly in the Bay County Jail.

Dore "did not have any visible injuries" on the night of the incident, deputies report, but on July 1, he contacted deputies to inform them that he sought treatment for bruises on his chest.

Kelly said he would rule on the evidentiary motions before the trial testimony begins today. Jury selection was scheduled to begin at 8 a.m.

Categories: [Courts and cops](#), [Front Page and Local](#)

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Food pantries say demand for help is great this year as economy struggles

Posted by [alpayne](#) November 19, 2008 08:07AM



Jeffrey LaMonde | Times PhotoMargaret

Majchrzak of Bay City sorts through the items at the First Presbyterian Church's food pantry, 805 Cedar Ave. Demand at food pantries is rising, and the Bay County Emergency Food Pantry Network is afraid that after the holidays, or even during, its shelves will be bare.

This year, it's more than just Bay County residents seeking holiday help for food and necessities.

The Bay County Emergency Food Pantry Network is afraid that after the holidays, or even during, its shelves will be bare.

"I am very concerned as to whether we'll be able to function in January," said Jeanne Schultz, volunteer for the Bay County Emergency Food Pantry Network. "We had over 200 families that we could not service for Thanksgiving this year."

Schultz said that while drives held to bring in donations of food are definitely helpful, it sometimes doesn't work in stocking up on basics.

"Right now we're gearing up for the holidays," said Schultz. "We really struggled in whether we could do Christmas baskets this year. We have the resources to do Thanksgiving baskets but were really strapped for Christmas."

Upon hearing that, the Doll Loesel Foundation, 1111 N. Water St., stepped in and will be donating 750 turkeys to be distributed in the Christmas baskets.

Bill Kerr, president of the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan, based in Flint, said this is a unique year because of the economic downturn.

"The community is feeling an uneasiness due to (General Motors Corp.) decisions, and it's a very scary time for a lot of people," he said. "These are some of the most needy times we've ever faced."

Kerr said the combination of greater need and greater fear is not good for the Food Bank, which serves 22 counties.

MAKE A DONATION

Bay County Emergency Food Pantry Network

- Visit any of 40 member churches to drop off food or money . Call 893-0092 for a list of members.

Hidden Harvest, 940 East Genesee Ave., Saginaw.

- To make a financial contribution, visit hiddenharvestshares.org.
- Volunteer your time by calling 753-4749.

Food Bank of Eastern Michigan, 2312 Lapeer Road, Flint.

- Visit fbem.org to download a donation form. Call 239-4441 for more information.

"We need people to give more today than they ever have," he said.

Last year, the Bay County Emergency Food Pantry Network distributed around 800 Thanksgiving baskets, which are filled with the essential items for a holiday dinner, and around 650 for Christmas. This year, around 710 Thanksgiving baskets will be given out and about 710 Christmas baskets.

"We are swamped every day with requests for 10 to 20 families. It's unbelievable," said Schultz. "And resources are down this year."

According to Hidden Harvest in Saginaw, more than 17 percent of people in the Bay, Midland and Saginaw County region live in poverty. The agency gives food from restaurants and individuals to food pantries and nonprofit agencies.

"We have actually increased the amount of food we've made available to food pantries ... but we can't keep up with the demand," said Rich Premo, president and CEO of Hidden Harvest.

Schultz said the reason for this year's troubles can be blamed on the economy.

"You see names you've never seen before," she said. "And ... I have to assume that they are just new to poverty.

Categories: [Community News](#), [Front Page and Local](#), [Top Photos](#)

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More in Genesee County struggle to keep heat, electricity on -- Here's how to get help

Posted by Melissa Burden | The Flint Journal November 18, 2008 15:34PM

GENESEE COUNTY, Michigan -- Tears streamed from Paul Coulter's eyes and his voice choked knowing he was just 24 hours away from losing power and heat in his two-story home.

The Flint father of three including two young children said he had to ask for help for the first time in his life because he has been unable to work for the past seven months after having surgery this spring for prostate cancer.

He found help at The Salvation Army, which along with the state Department of Human Services will help pay his past-due utility bill of about \$1,700.

"If I ever get some money, I'm going to bring it down here," said Coulter, 51, through tears Monday as he left the Salvation Army's downtown Flint office.

Statewide, residential electric shut offs for failing to pay bills is up 18.6 percent from January through August 2008 compared to the same period a year earlier, according to the latest available data filed by utilities with the Michigan Public Service Commission.

Flint Journal extras

If you need help

- Consumers Energy: Call the utility at (800) 477-5050 to find out what payment options and assistance programs are available.
- State assistance: The Michigan Department of Human Services' State Emergency Relief Program can provide immediate help to people facing emergencies such as having heat and utilities shut off. Details on the program and three Genesee County office locations: www.michigan.gov/dhs
- Salvation Army of Genesee County: Those needing assistance should call (810) 232-2196 beginning at 9 a.m. weekdays for a same day appointment. You'll need a decision letter from DHS, a shut off notice, recent Consumers Energy bill with your name on it, proof of household income, a picture ID, original Social Security cards for everyone in the household and receipts for bills paid within the last 30 days.
- Genesee County Community Action Resource Department (GCCARD): For help paying a utility bill or for help to restore service, call (810) 768-4675.

On the flip side, natural gas shut offs actually are down 11.79 percent for the same period compared with a year earlier, according to the MPSC.

Every weekday, the phones ring and ring at Genesee County Community Action Resource Department offices, with residents looking for help.

And the business manager of the Salvation Army in Genesee County also says the need is great this year, as many people face hundreds of dollars in bills to avoid getting their heat and/or electricity shut off.

The sluggish economy and job losses, coupled with higher food costs, is boosting the number of county residents looking for help with shut off notices.

"We are increasingly receiving calls," said Lolita Bentley, a senior account clerk with GCCARD. "The demand is very high and unfortunately there isn't enough money to go around."

And all this with those really cold months of winter still ahead of us and as Consumers Energy expects customers to see bills jump about 7 percent this winter.

Need help?

The good news, is that if you need help now, there is money available.

The state Department of Human Services' crisis assistance program -- which provides emergency cash to people facing shut offs or those who need emergency heating oil -- expects to help nine times more households this year than last.

It expects to give out an average of \$715 (up \$214 from last year) to more than 197,000 households.

Flint Journal extras Tips to lower utilities bills

- **Try a programmable thermostat that will modify the temperature in your home throughout the day. This could save \$185 annually.**
- **Use compact fluorescent light bulbs which are more energy efficient than traditional bulbs. Switching can provide annual savings of \$166.**
- **Upgrade your refrigerator to an ENERGY STAR certified fridge, which uses half the electricity of a model from the early 1990s. The new fridge can shave \$9 annually off your utility bill.**
- **Use an ENERGY STAR washing machine, which also reduces water usage. These machines can save you \$46 annually.**

Sources: Kiplinger's Personal Finance

The money for the assistance comes from federal dollars earmarked to help low-income residents with energy costs.

You can seek emergency services funds at three local DHS offices. Both GCCARD and Salvation Army require people first meet with DHS.

Not everyone gets the funding that asks for it, unfortunately, said Bill Goodwill, business manager for the Salvation Army in Genesee County. He said sometimes the agency runs out of money to help people and that some may not be eligible if they don't have the proper required documentation.

The programs are designed to help anyone with a shut off notice, Goodwill said. Sometimes the bills are \$50 to \$100 but many lately are as high as a few thousand dollars.

This month, the Salvation Army can pay up to \$750 toward people's Consumers Energy bills. The amount can vary based on the funding it receives.

GCCARD currently can assist you with up to \$450 for shut offs, Bentley said.

In some cases, the assistance from these agencies and the state may not cover all of a really high bill and you may need to come up with the difference.

This year, Consumers Energy's typical residential customer can expect an average bill of \$160 a month from Nov. 1 through March 31. That's up from about \$150 a month last year.

So if you think you might have a problem paying your current or next bill, call the utility now, said Judy Palnau, a spokeswoman from the MPSC.

"Call sooner rather than later, and get on a program, whether it's a winter protection program or a budget payment program," she said.

Generally, low income people and seniors can be protected from service shut offs or high payments during the winter months as long as you make minimum payments, Palnau said. Come spring, however, you have to pay the amount owed.

You should call your utility for specifics on their plans and to find out if you're eligible, she said.

Flint Journal extras

Tips on energy conservation

- www.consumersenergy.com/energyanswers
- www.michigan.gov/mpsc and then click on consumer information and the link for Be WinterWise.

A growing need

And it appears it'll be a busy year for assistance agencies such as GCCARD and the Salvation Army.

Nearly 400 households were served at GCCARD from Oct. 1, 2006-Sept. 30, 2007, receiving a total of about \$159,000 in utility shut off assistance. Each household assisted received an average of about \$400.

The numbers jump dramatically this past fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, with 580 households assisted, receiving a total of \$300,631 or about \$529 per household.

The Salvation Army in Genesee County helps about 1,450 families per fiscal year (Oct. 1-Sept. 30) with utility assistance, Goodwill said.

While that number has stayed constant in recent years, the need per family is growing, Goodwill said.

"It seems like the bills are getting bigger," he said, adding some people come in with "horrendous bills" of several thousand dollars.

This past fiscal year, the Salvation Army used \$631,930 on utility assistance in the county, up from \$517,390 the year earlier.

And that increase led to cuts in other assistance areas, Goodwill said.

"We spent less money on shelter and food or something else to assist with utilities," he said.

Consumers Energy, which serves 2.9 million customers statewide including in Genesee County, had 68,000 residential shut offs for nonpayment of electric and natural gas service from January through June 2008.

That's about the same number recorded during the six-month period a year earlier, spokeswoman Mary Gust said. She said the figures could not be broken down by county.

"Clearly, disconnecting someone's service is our last resort," she said.

Gust said the utility makes several attempts to reach the customer about their past due status and collect payments. Shut off notices are for 10 days and customers have that long to make arrangements with the utility. She said people can even pay the representative when he or she comes to disconnect service.

November bills also included inserts on payment assistance programs, she said.

"We do stress they give us a call so we can work with them," Gust said.

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Wednesday, November 19, 2008

Groups help to heat homes

DTE, community leaders offer families tips, will help solicit aid to combat rising energy costs in tough times.

Delores Flynn / The Detroit News

SOUTHFIELD -- DTE Energy joined church leaders and community agencies Tuesday to announce programs to help families cope with rising energy costs.

"To heat or to eat is a tough choice, and a decision that no one should have to face this winter," said Jerry Norcia, president and COO of DTE Energy. "We want our customers to know that there are options available that can help them manage their utility bills and get through the winter safe and warm."

Southeast Michigan residents will see a 10 percent increase in gas bills this winter while others across the country could see prices climb 30 percent, according to David Parker, president of the American Gas Association.

DTE has partnered with four churches to develop the Community Energy Solutions Program to provide one-on-one budget and credit counseling. Residents can learn about cost-effective insulation and thermostat tips that can reduce bills 3 percent for every degree home temperatures are set below 72 degrees, said Steven Kurmas, executive vice president of fossil generation for Detroit Edison.

The churches -- Fellowship Chapel, New Galilee Baptist Church, Second Ebenezer Church and St. Cecilia Catholic Church, all in Detroit -- will hold forums to answer questions about winter heating and help residents apply for a home heating tax credit and assistance with paying their energy bills.

"This is an exciting program because people will have a place to go talk with someone face to face about their problems and get help, which can be difficult to do by phone," said the Rev. Horace Sheffield III of New Galilee.

Angela Thompson of Southfield was pleased.

"Some weather forecasters are predicting a colder winter than last year. So I'm happy DTE is willing to reach out to those who may be in need to keep the heat on and keep bills affordable," she said. "This is not about giving people a handout but a hand-up to keep their houses in order."

DTE has also created a "Cents for Energy" program in conjunction with The Heat and Warmth Fund that will allow the community to help people pay their energy bills.

Residents will be allowed to round up their utility bill payment to the nearest dollar and add up to \$10 in donations to the fund. The money will be used to assist customers who are slightly above the poverty guidelines and not able to qualify for many low-income federal assistance programs.

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DTE Energy, Community Leaders Help Families Cope With Rising Energy Costs

DETROIT, Nov. 18 /PRNewswire/ -- With heating costs rising and Michigan's economy struggling, DTE Energy and a number of community organizations are working to help families keep their heat and lights on this winter.

"Michigan is going through some very tough economic times, and we recognize that energy bills are going to be difficult for many people to pay," said Jerry Norcia, president and COO of DTE Energy's MichCon natural gas utility. "We want our customers to know that there are options available that can help them manage their utility bills and get through the winter safe and warm."

DTE Energy was joined today by representatives from local community service agencies and others who share concerns about the economic realities of the upcoming heating season. Organizations joining the company included THAW (The Heat and Warmth Fund), the Salvation Army, United Way - 211, the Michigan Department of Human Services and a number of Detroit-area churches.

"To heat or to eat is a tough choice -- and a decision that no one should have to face this winter," Norcia said. "DTE Energy has a number of programs that help customers manage their utility bills and we are casting a wide safety net for our customers with support from many of the organizations represented here today."

Heating costs across the country are expected to be about 10 to 30 percent higher this winter than last season, according to David Parker, president of the American Gas Association which represents more than 200 energy companies nationwide. While Michigan will see costs at the lower end of the anticipated increase -- about 10 percent -- local households will experience a tougher challenge than other regions because of the state's difficult economy.

"Collaborative efforts between utilities, community and governmental organizations are exactly what we need to lessen the blow on those struggling to stay warm this winter," Parker said. "I can assure you that the common goal of all those present today is to avoid having to shut off service to those who are unable to pay, and to find options for all customers to maintain service this winter."

With a growing number of families trying to meet basic financial obligations, cooperative efforts between DTE Energy and the community will play a critical role in helping households maintain utility service, according to Dr. Bertram Marks of the Council of Baptist Ministers of Detroit and Vicinity.

"Whenever we are challenged in this region, we come together as a community to work things out," he said. "This is an excellent example of how we can help family, friends and neighbors manage their energy bills and safely maintain utility service by working together."

While DTE Energy understands that many households will have to make tough choices about what bills to pay this winter, the company warned that stealing electric or gas service is not only illegal, but extremely dangerous.

"Some customers are going to extreme measures to heat their homes and keep their lights on by reconnecting their gas or electric service in some of the most dangerous methods imaginable," Norcia said. "Let me be clear -- energy theft is dangerous ... not only for those choosing to do so, but for others who may live nearby. If you steal electricity or gas, you are risking your life and the lives of others who are nearest and dearest to you."

While the heating season will present a particular challenge to those suffering economic hardships this winter, Steve Kurmas, president and COO-elect of DTE Energy's Detroit Edison electric utility, said that virtually everyone is looking for ways to manage their energy bills and reduce their energy use.

All households can benefit from energy conservation and efficiency.

"For instance, by lowering their thermostat just a few degrees consumers can save about 10 percent on their monthly heating bills," Kurmas said. "A number of simple, cost-effective energy saving tips are available on DTE Energy's Web site, and through an interactive online tool called MyEnergy Analyzer."

Kurmas said DTE Energy has conducted 50 free Energy Efficiency Forums around the state this year to teach customers how to seal air leaks, insulate their homes and obtain the most energy efficient appliances. The company also has launched a pilot program offering rebates to customers who purchase a high-efficiency furnace or have a professional energy audit performed on their home.

While DTE Energy offers a wide array of energy assistance programs, it is going to take a community effort to solve the significant challenges facing the state this winter, according to Kurmas.

"DTE Energy, the organizations represented here today and others working toward solutions need to be joined by individuals around the state to ensure that those people who need help this winter get it," Kurmas said. "No company, no individual, no church or social service agency will be able to tackle this alone. It must be a community effort."

Additional information about resources available to DTE Energy customers is available at www.my.dteenergy.com or by calling DTE Energy customer service at (800) 477-4747.

METRO TIMES | 11/19/2008

News Hits

For a great America ...

BY NEWS HITS STAFF

News Hits visited last week's big Voices for Action Poverty Summit at Cobo to catch a rousing speech by **Martin Luther King III**.

The son of the slain civil rights leader did not disappoint, delivering a message equal parts outrage over economic injustices that have "families wading through the high waters of pending foreclosures" and hope that springs from believing our nation's "ability to do good in the world is boundless."

Certainly our circumstances are daunting. About 37 million people in the world's richest nation live in poverty. Here in Michigan, one in five people live at or near the poverty level, some 500,000 of them children.

King talked movingly of how his father and mother must be looking down at the results of the presidential election beaming with elation. But we're still fighting two wars, and there is still much work to be done if we're ever to achieve anything approaching widespread social justice. And it's up to all of us to do that work: "America needs more than a great president to realize my father's dream. What America needs is a great America."

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Michigan's October unemployment rate surges to 9.3 percent

Posted by Kathy Barks Hoffman | Associated Press November 19, 2008 12:35PM

LANSING -- Michigan's October unemployment rate surged to 9.3 percent, its highest rate since July 1992.

The national unemployment rate last month also rose, to 6.5 percent.

The Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth said Wednesday the state has been hurt by the weakening of the national economy. Its work force has fallen by 74,000 people, or 1.5 percent, since October 2007.

Michigan's year-to-date average jobless rate through October was 8.1 percent, above the 2007 annual average rate of 7.2 percent. The state had the nation's highest annual unemployment rate in 2006 and 2007, and is on track to be the highest again in 2008.

Trade, transportation and utilities lost 5,000 jobs last month, while leisure and hospitality services lost 4,000.

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